

Sago Palms Pose Poisoning Danger to Cats

The ASPCA warns cat owners to keep pets away from the plants.

By Stacy N. Hackett

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Sago palm plants are toxic to cats and other pets. Sago palms make beautiful additions to backyard landscapes and are starting to make their way indoors as houseplants. The ASPCA Animal Poison Control Center (APCC), however, cautions pet owners to keep their cats and dogs away from this attractive plant, as it is highly toxic.

Sago and other cycad palms contain toxic compounds that can result in vomiting and diarrhea, weakness, seizures and even liver failure and death in cats and dogs, according to Dr. Sharon Gwaltney-Brant, veterinary toxicologist and vice president of the ASPCA APCC. "Many people are familiar with this plant's poisonous nature assume that the only poisonous portions are the seed, or nut, from the female," she said. "However, all parts of these plants are toxic, whether male or female."

The Center's reported cases of poisoning from Sago and other cycad palms have increased more than 200 percent in the past five years, Gwaltney-Brant said — and 50 to 75 percent of those cases have resulted in fatalities. "Because pet parents and possibly veterinarians in northern regions of the country where these plants are becoming more popular may not be as familiar with the toxic effects of cycad palms, we feel that it is critical to get information out about their toxic potential," she said.

Gwaltney-Brant recommends that pet owners keep their cats and dogs from coming into contact with any Sago Palms. As an alternative, she suggests removing the plant altogether and replacing it with a nontoxic plant.